

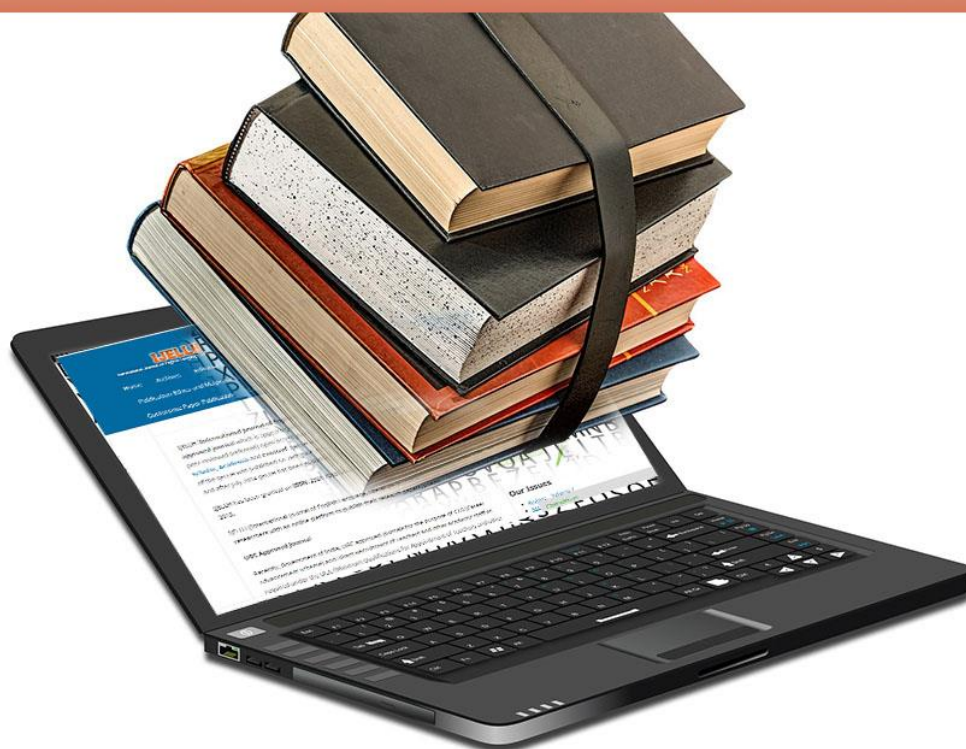
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Revisiting Cultural Learning in ESL Classroom: +2 Level School Education
(CBSE and ICSE)

Abstract

A proper language teaching demands compatibility with its cultural content, as there can be no real learning of a language without understanding the patterns and values of the culture of which it is either a part or which it is representing. In a multicultural society like India, where we have students from various cultural groups, ethnic or religious faith, a teacher has to face certain problems occurring due to cultural diversity. The proposed research work attempts to explore the problems faced by the learners learning the culture of the second language (English as a Second Language/ESL) and also to trace the aims and goals of cultural teaching in classroom. The main objective here is to bring out the problems, to study and to throw light on the process of cultural teaching/learning, primarily at senior secondary (+2)

levels, on the basis of the teaching materials used in the CBSE & ICSE courses. While teaching English in the classroom, the teacher of the second language has to explain certain cultural contents at the level of meaning to the students, hence the students invariably learn cultural patterns of the target language.

Keywords: Culture, Cultural Learning, ESL, CBSE, ICSE.

The teaching of English as a second language at +2 or the senior secondary level in India is no doubt done with a purpose to further improve the proficiency of the learner in the basic skills of English i.e. LSRW- listening, speaking, reading & writing. However, apart from enhancing the basic skills of the learner this very teaching of English as a second language (ESL) fulfils the task related to the cultural awareness among the learners.

The fact is that no language teaching can be done without transferring the culture encoded in the language, which is sometimes done with a purpose but most of the times it is integrated (Cole.1996, Walker.2000). This is because the foreign language or the second language learning cannot be separated from this very aspect of cultural education or cultural learning. A number of linguists have pointed out towards the role of language in cultural learning and vice versa; and it has been observed that the teaching of any language as foreign or second is always to make the learners aware of a foreign culture.

Therefore, when we learn/teach a language, we not only learn to interpret the signs or to decode them, we actually learn certain patterns of behaviour as well. Language conveys culture, and language is itself subject to culturally conditioned attitudes and behaviours, customs and traditions, thoughts and lifestyles; which cannot be left ignored in the classrooms. So, culture in all possible forms: beliefs/values, tangible/intangible, are explained and taught to the learners who possess some base culture before they are taught the elements of the target culture.

Hence, in the teaching of English as a second language we facilitate cultural transfer particularly in some very obvious aspects like: social behaviour, greetings, names, relation and relational terms, social and religious functions, cuisines and dressing sense, as well as reference to or allusions from religious books or literary works and the like.

National Policy on Education 2016 also analyses that the study of English would enable a learner to transcend geographical boundaries and cultural limitations, it would assist them to function effectively at the national and international level. Proficiency in English language, besides the mother-tongue, will empower the learner in due course to communicate outside their own language group for all practical purposes including cultural exchange, which are based on our cultural experiences. Our cultural experiences are a part of our perspective towards things, people and the world. Things make sense to us based on our cultural experiences. Our communication, interaction, games, beliefs and customs are all guided by the culture we belong to. It is impossible to separate a person from his/her cultural context, as cultural context is something which a person carries with him since the very initial days of his life. The beliefs, value system, understandings, perspectives are all shaped by the culture. “The ways in which we learn cannot be separated from these cultural contexts. We all bring a set of cultural understandings, perspectives, and expectations to school with us.”

- Darling-Hammond, Linda. Austin, Kim. Lit, Ira. and Nasir, Na'ilah.

Culture in other words is an indispensable part of one's life, it is so thoroughly present throughout every stage of one's life that at times we stop considering it as culture. A proper language teaching demands compatibility with its cultural content, as there can be no real learning of a language without understanding the patterns and values of the culture of which it is either a part or which it is representing.

The foreign language or the second language may be misunderstood because its cultural content differs from the native patterns, this difference needs proper interpretation for better understanding of, especially when the language is being taught for 'educational purpose', this becomes indispensable. *Robert Lado* (1964) has very well remarked – “.....to become really educated, it is necessary for a student to absorb the full cultural meaning of the target language where it differs significantly from the native one.”

Moreover, talking about India, we find multicultural and multilingual classroom condition, where cultural awareness is integral in coming to grips with the second language. The relevance of cultural teaching/learning in FL/SL pedagogy is always there and it needs a close enquiry and study by making a discourse analysis of the materials, both native and non-native literature, used at +2 levels in India (*CBSE & ICSE*).

The syllabus of English prescribed for class XI and XII in both the boards would remain incomplete without a mention of the principles and salient features of the curriculums. *The Senior School Curriculum 2018-19*, Volume – I, Main Subjects for Classes XI-XII, Central Board of Secondary Education, Delhi-110 002 states the principles of the curriculum in these words

“..... The curriculum provided by CBSE is based on National Curriculum Framework-2005 and seeks to provide opportunities for students to achieve excellence in learning.

1.1 Salient Features of the CBSE Secondary School Curriculum

The Curriculum prescribed by CBSE strives to:

1. provide ample scope for physical, intellectual and social development of students;
2. enlist general and specific teaching and assessment objectives;

3. uphold Constitutional values such as socialism, secularism, democracy, republican character, justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, human dignity and the unity and integrity of the Nation by encouraging values-based learning activities;
4. nurture Life-Skills by prescribing curricular and co-curricular activities to help improve self-esteem, empathy towards others and different cultures etc.;
5. integrate innovations in pedagogy, knowledge and application, such as human sciences with technological innovations to keep pace with the global trends in various disciplines;
6. promote inclusive education by providing equal opportunities to all students;
7. integrate environmental education in various disciplines from classes;
8. equally emphasize Co-scholastic areas of Art Education and Health and Physical Education.”

Objectives of the Curriculum prescribed by CBSE, Delhi, is also a crucial part of the National Curriculum Framework 2005.

“The Curriculum aims to:

1. achieve cognitive, affective and psychomotor excellence;
2. enhance self-awareness and explore innate potential;
3. promote Life Skills goal setting, decision making and lifelong learning;
4. inculcate values and foster cultural learning and international understanding in an interdependent society;
5. acquire the ability to utilize technology and information for the betterment of humankind;
6. strengthen knowledge and attitude related to livelihood skills;

7. develop the ability to appreciate art and showcase talents;
8. promote physical fitness, health and well-being.”

CBSE aims to help learners cultivate an interest and appreciation for both academics and arts. It encourages them to participate in related activities, thus, promoting abilities such as imagination, creativity, value arts, and the cultural heritage. It is because of this idea of holistic growth of a learner, the eight learning areas are integrated with each other in terms of knowledge, skills (life and livelihood), comprehension, values and attitudes.

“Learners should get opportunities to think laterally, critically, identify opportunity, challenge their potential and be open to challenges. Learners value and engage in practices that promote physical, cognitive, emotional and social development and wellbeing. This enables learners to connect different areas of knowledge, application and values with their own lives and the world around them. The holistic nature of human learning and knowledge should be brought forth throughout.”

(-*Senior School Curriculum 2018-19*, Volume – I, Main Subjects for Classes XI-XII,

Central Board of Secondary Education, Delhi).

For the purpose of fostering competence in the learner, the curriculum encompasses nine major learning areas, viz: Languages, Humanities, Mathematics, Science and Technology, General Studies, and Health and Physical Education. With greater academic orientation and research skills in core academic areas, students would evolve as aware young adults with a sense of real self-estimate having true values and principles.

Aims of the syllabus prescribed by ICSE for '*English Language (801) a Compulsory Subject*' includes the use of the language for social and cultural interactions along with the enhancement of LSRW skills:

“COMPULSORY SUBJECT ENGLISH (801)

Aims (English Language)

To develop the ability to:

- derive, infer and critically assess information through listening.
- express oneself by speaking individually, or in a discussion.
- read with comprehension drawing information directly or by inference from the text, through an understanding of grammar and structure, vocabulary and idiom.
- employ a variety of skills in writing: within a framework, using argument or imagination or note making and summarizing.
- use the English language for the purpose of study and social and cultural interaction.
- speak and write clearly and to the purpose, using appropriate grammar, vocabulary and idiom.

Aims (Prescribed Texts)

1. To enjoy and appreciate literature through a critical study of selected literary works.
2. Through the study of literature:
 - approach an understanding of humanity.
 - develop an interest in the thought and culture of the peoples of the world.

- develop the power of expression and a sense of aesthetic values.”

(-Indian School Certificate Examination/ICSE, New Delhi).

The books prescribed under the section ‘Literary Books and Supplementary Readers’ for Class XI are:

1. *Hornbill*: Textbook published by NCERT, New Delhi
2. *Snapshots*: Supplementary Reader published by NCERT, New Delhi.

Prescribed Books for Class XII by CBSE are:

1. *Flamingo*: English Reader published by National Council of Education Research and Training, New Delhi
2. *Vistas*: Supplementary Reader published by National Council of Education Research and Training, New Delhi

Extended Reading Texts:

- i) *The Invisible Man (unabridged) by H.G.Wells*
- ii) *Silas Marner (unabridged) by George Eliot*

The syllabus prescribed by both CBSE and ICSE include literary texts. Literature has been used as a pedagogical tool in teaching the second language and its culture since the very beginning of language learning and teaching. It can also be used as a fundamental source to expose students to different facets and various aspects of culture and cultural learning. Literature can be utilised as a stimulus in ESL classroom to get a better understanding of the everyday chores and activities of the target culture and also to help learners to critically analyse and compare it with their respective cultures. In this whole process cultural learning becomes

a dialogue process where the learners are facilitated to study their values, perceptions and practices in a redefined persuasive discourse, as culture can find its expression through the medium of literature in its best ever format. Literary texts are an indispensable and very important resource of authentic language that learners can avail themselves to. Exposure to literary texts and works can assist them in expanding their language awareness and develop their language/linguistic competence. Literature can become a medium of teaching culture in second and the foreign language classroom, as literature has the capacity to both language and a situation simultaneously i.e. a learner gets to know a language well through a situation in a contextualized form.

For an instance, the story narrated in the first chapter of the book *Snapshots*, The “Summer of the Beautiful White Horse” by *William Saroyan*, revolves around characters Mourad and Aram two young boys aged thirteen and nine respectively, who belong to a tribe in Armenia. The story does not have a breathless adventure and exciting action still it happens to be interesting for the class.

“We were poor. We had no money. Our whole tribe was poverty stricken. Every branch of the Garoghlanian family was living in the most amazing and comical poverty in the world. Nobody could understand where we got money enough to keep us with food in our bellies, not even the old men of the families. Most important of all, though we were famous for our honesty. We had been famous for our honesty for something like eleven centuries, even when we had been the wealthiest family in what we liked to think was the world.”

The above narrative is enough for a learner in an ESL classroom to take note of the tribe mentioned. In the Indian context, particularly in the plains and in metropolitan cities the students think of tribes to be an uncouth lot with little or crude culture. This wrong notion has to be removed by the teacher with a target of making the students culturally informed and

aware. They need to be made conscious of the fact that tribes have been ethnic groups with traditional and indigenous knowledge base living in a unique ecology with a distinctive social milieu. This distinction or uniqueness should not be taken by the students as lack of culture. The responsibility lies with the teacher to make the students realise about the diversity of tribes in India, their importance and contribution. The teacher could name different tribes of a few states and outline their respective cultural practices. The misconception spread by movies, comics and oral narratives about tribes as people wrapped in loin clothes with spears in hands set out to kill animals or other men needs to be checked. The chapter motivates a learner to know more about the tribe, its existence, its location. A conscious teacher who is ready with the home work can readily inspire and educate the learner at this moment by either providing the learner with the information about the tribe or take it a step further. The teacher can get the task mentioned in the end of the chapter fulfilled by the learner. The task says:

“The story revolves around characters who belong to a tribe in Armenia. Mourad and Aram are members of the Garoghlanian family. Now locate Armenia and Assyria on the atlas and prepare a write-up on the Garoghlanian tribes. You may write about people, their names, traits, geographical and economic features as suggested in the story.”

The task mentioned here is one of the likes enumerated in the end of every chapter under the caption “Reading with Insight”. In the classes where the teacher prepares the students for the next class by assigning the task of reading the chapter beforehand, the tasks mentioned under ‘Reading with Insight’ are of great help to both the student and the teacher. As I have already mentioned in the Introduction of my research that to get the real and first-hand picture of the ESL classroom, I have engaged a few classes in the senior secondary level specifically of a *CBSE* +2 School. The results of assigning the task of reading a chapter to be taught beforehand were encouraging. The majority of class tried to find out whatever facts they could,

related to the chapter. For an instance, while teaching chapter 6. “The Ghat of the Only World” by *Amitav Ghosh* from the *Snapshots* a student came up with questions about the reasons behind Agha Shahid Ali being an expatriate Kashmiri. The question which was left unanswered was that his works and his poetry vividly display and reflect the beauty of Kashmir and the sense of Kashmiriyat, what stopped him then to return to his homeland. The other few were ready with information about his education, poetry, works and awards. Amitav Ghosh the author was also explored well by the students. By the end of the class learners discussed not only the cultural, metaphorical, grammatical elements of the chapter but also the culture followed and languages spoken in Kashmir. The metaphorical title of the chapter “The Ghat of the Only World” acted as a stimulus for various discussions, like metaphor and the idea of life and death. Further in the chapter *Amitav Ghosh* writes:

“He was aware, as he had long been, of his approaching end and he had made his peace with it. I saw no trace of anguish or conflict: surrounded by the love of his family and friends, he was calm, contented, at peace. He had said to me once, ‘I love to think that I’ll meet my mother in the afterlife, if there is an afterlife.’ I had the sense that as the end neared, this was his supreme consolation.”

Again, the mention of ‘afterlife’ is worth a discussion in an ESL classroom where students from different religions are present. ‘Afterlife’ for a student from Hindu religion is a concept of ‘*punar-janam*’ where the body dies as it is ‘*nashwar*’ i.e. could be destroyed and the soul lives on to take a re-birth in a ‘*yoni*’ based on his deeds. Whereas for a Muslim kid the concept of ‘afterlife’ is entirely different, his beliefs say that once dead he/she would rise on the day of resurrection or the day of judgement ‘*Qayamat*’. An interaction like this gives some information to learner about the beliefs of their counterpart.

The stories and the poems also discuss about the living styles, dressing manners, eating habits, culinary styles of the people. There are instances where a student might not be able to relate it with their culture but then he/she comes to know more about the various traditions practiced in various parts of his country and world both. In chapter 1. “The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse” the following lines need a mention:

“That afternoon my uncle Khosrove came to our house for coffee and cigarettes. He sat in the parlour, sipping and smoking and remembering the old country. Then another visitor arrived, a farmer named John Byro, an Assyrian who, out of loneliness, had learned to speak Armenian. My mother brought the lonely visitor coffee and tobacco and he rolled a cigarette and sipped and smoked...”

For a learner in India, especially urban north India the tradition of offering tobacco is a cultural shock. The scene immediately heats up the discussions related to things offered to guests and about a guest being regarded as God ‘*atithi devo bhava*’. The student who have never lived in a village or are living since generations in the cities are more appalled by offering of tobacco to a guest. Here, the teacher interferes and explains that how in the rural areas our ancestors used to relish ‘*huqqa*’ which was offered to the visitor also as a sign of welcome and respect. The students can also be explained that such things were usually practiced by men all over the world especially between men to develop comradeships. The discussion also brings up things like ‘*betel nut*’, ‘*betel leaf*’ to the fore and how these things still are a part of Indian rituals specially related to wedding in both Hindu and Muslim culture. The title of the Chapter 3 from *Snapshots* “Ranga’s Marriage” by *Masti Venkatesha Iyengar* itself initiates a talk about marriage. The author himself begins with:

“When you see this title, some of you may ask, “Ranga’s Marriage?” Why not “Ranganatha Vivaha” or “Ranganatha Vijaya?” Well, yes. I know I could have used some other mouth-

filling one like “Jagannatha Vijaya” or “Girija Kalyana.” But then, this is not about Jagannatha’s victory or Girija’s wedding. It’s about our own Ranga’s marriage and hence no fancy title.”

A marriage could be called by various names in South India, ‘*vivaha*’, ‘*vijaya*’, ‘*kalyana*’. The learner is ready with other names to add which are used in his/her society, ‘*shadi*’, ‘*vivaah*’, ‘*byaah*’, ‘*lagan*’, at times ‘*gauna*’, ‘*bidayi*’, ‘*nikah*’ and ‘*rukhsati*’ also. The term ‘*vivaha*’ or ‘*vivaah*’ sounds familiar to them and this may be led to motivate the learner to dig deep and find out the reason. The usage of ‘Sanskrit’ and Sanskrit being mother to various Indian languages can be discussed. Later in the chapter the author mentions Mysore and praises his native place Hoshalli in a metaphorical manner. “If the state of Mysore is to Bharatavarsha what the sweet karigadabu is to a festive meal, then Hosahalli is to Mysore State what the filling is to the karigadabu.”

The metaphor stated above could only make sense to a learner when it is explained by giving an example with which they could relate along with some familiarity to ‘karigadabu’. ‘*Kargadabu*’ is a South Indian fried sweet filled with coconut and sugar. For a North Indian learner, it may be unknown but there are similar sweet dishes in their part of society also like ‘*gujia*’ which is filled with sweet semolina mixed with coconut. The metaphor could be used in a different manner then. For example, ‘if New Delhi is to *Bharat* what the sweet gujia is to a festive meal, then Red Fort is to Delhi what the filling is to the gujia.’ A different take on the metaphor could be ‘if all the states together make the cake, Kashmir is the cherry to the cake.’

However, an even important point is made through the metaphor. A North Indian learner’s biased is broken by giving Mysore an importance which a North Indian dweller would give to his own region. Such statements and the discussions that ensue makes a learner accept other parts of India with interest and a feeling of belongingness. Thinking about India as a

whole and curiosity to know more about the territories never visited and to learn and compare the cultures followed are some of the targets which are achieved with the help of these literary texts in an ESL classroom. The chapter in discussion is full of various stimulus for cultural learning. The terms used for sweet dish, the term used to address the elder, people's pride in seeing the hero following the traditions even after being highly educated are a few. What could surprise a learner is the marriage of Ranga with a girl who is only eleven years old. The story portrays the eleven years old girl as a suitable prospective bride and not as a child. The teacher here has to tackle the situation in a sensible and responsible way, taking care as to do justice with the story as a part of literature and also taking care not to glorify the act of child marriage. The present laws and rules should be brought into light and care should be taken that the class could understand that the story gives a normal treatment to the marriage of a child only because it was not considered as a taboo and was a normal practice in olden days. Such topics not only makes a learner aware culturally but also makes them aware about the social evils and the laws to prevent them. "...he said, My white horse which was stolen last month is still gone — I cannot understand it. My uncle Khosrove became very irritated and shouted, It's no harm. What is the loss of a horse? Haven't we all lost the homeland? What is this crying over a horse?"

Loss of the homeland is mentioned in a very non-formal manner in "The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse", but the pain of displacement can be felt. The issue doesn't demand an elaborate explanation but the teacher can sensitise the class keeping in mind the contemporary world's crisis regarding displacement of people and tribes from their homelands. The migration of farmers from their villages, of the tribal people from the hinterlands and of the urban people to western and European countries on national front, and mass migrations taking place on international front. A similar topic again comes up for discussion in chapter 1. of '*Flamingo*', Textbook in English for Class XII (Core Course), "The Last Lesson" by *Alphonse Daudet*. The story is set in the days of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) in which

France was defeated by Prussia led by Bismarck. Prussia then consisted of what now are the nations of Germany, Poland and parts of Austria. In this story the French districts of Alsace and Lorraine have passed into Prussian hands. Although the homeland of these people was not snatched away from them but they were forced to become a linguistic minority in their own country. The text book in the section 'Talking about the Text' drives students towards thinking and understanding the importance of one's language.

"What happens to a linguistic minority in a state? How do you think they can keep their language alive? For example:

Punjabis in Bangalore

Tamilians in Mumbai

Kannadigas in Delhi

Gujaratis in Kolkata"

The question can readily be used as a stimulus to motivate a learner to know more about his/her mother tongue and other languages of the land which are dying a slow death in dearth of enthusiastic speakers and learners. The story also makes the class aware of the fact that there is lot more to know about the World Wars than the dates, years, allies and immediate causes. They get to know about the feelings and sufferings of those who were enslaved and also that wars are not only about the wins and the defeats because at the moment when wars were ensuing it was not only the maps and boundaries of a country which was being defined but also the lives of the innocent people living there in various manners which could not be justifiably read in a History class.

“While I was wondering about it all, M. Hamel mounted his chair, and, in the same grave and gentle tone which he had used to me, said, “My children, this is the last lesson I shall give you. The order has come from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. The new master comes tomorrow. This is your last French lesson. I want you to be very attentive.” What a thunderclap these words were to me!”

The pain that is inflicted on the people of a territory by its conquerors by taking away the right to study or speak their own language is the theme of the story. The people in this story suddenly realise how precious their language is to them, the same language which most of them never cared to learn properly and completely. Preventing a people from learning their own language and imposition of another language on them would count as linguistic chauvinism, the reason behind such impositions were not merely to show might or display victory but also to enslave a whole clan psychologically and morally. “When a people are enslaved, as long as they hold fast to their language it is as if they had the key to their prison.

The learners could be made to think of examples in history where a conquered people had their language taken away from them or had a language imposed on them. The circumstances faced by a linguistic minority in a state like how they keep their language alive, how many linguistic minorities reside in India, what has happened to the languages which are no more or rarely spoken or used could be probed. India has been a home to a number of languages and each language has its own history and has produced literature which is a not only a mirror to the then society but also acts as an inventory to the cultures lost. The more a learner is curious to know about the lost languages and lost cultures of one’s own land and also of the world, the chances to revive dying languages and cultures on the verge of extinction increases. The future and the present can be safely passed on to such sensitive and culturally aware and educated generation. Extension activities like consulting particular sections of

Indian Constitution, referring to the rulings made by the courts of justice or the statements made by political and civil groups, keeping updates about the conferences and festivals held for promotion of a language can be included that would help pupils understand language rights of the citizens and the problems of linguistic minorities, social and political awareness is an added benefit to the learner.

The stories and poems prescribed for the learners teach various lessons related to academics, literature and language, aesthetic values, thought and cultures of the peoples of the world. The poem “Phenomenal Woman” by *Maya Angelou* prescribed in the syllabus of *ICSE* acts as a bridge between two distant cultures. The beginning lines, “Pretty women wonder where my secret lies; I’m not cute or built to suit a fashion model’s size” act as a myth buster for the growing minds. The poem can be used by a teacher intelligently to destroy the definitions of beauty by a patriarchal society obsessed with the complexion and size of a woman and also to instil in young minds that beauty has no set boundaries. At the same time the poem also drives the learner towards comparing an Indian woman to the modern feminist woman of the poem.

Therefore, the purpose of teaching / learning F/L is to train learners to participate competently both linguistically and culturally at the global level in matters of communication and sharing knowledge. It is an acknowledged fact that communication in any form involves culture and communicating in FL/SL is performing in another culture. The Hammerstein model of dividing culture into three components: achievement culture, informational culture and behavioural culture, provides a point of debate regarding the teaching/learning of culture in FL/SL classroom. Moreover, the aim of teaching a particular component of culture might change depending on the context or needs. But one thing is very certain that the meaning system of the second culture has to be considered while teaching a second language especially at this

level of school education, as +2schools are the feeders to higher education institutions in India from where the students pick up the streams of different disciplines where they are expected to be professionally trained. They may be trained but not culturally cemented. Schools education comes under the aegis of Ministry of Human Resources Department, schools and students are human resources. The cultural exposure given at this stage of education and age can plug the social and cultural gap by serious initiatives taken towards cultural learning through curricular discussions.

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